



## Evaluation of a module on a university teacher training programme: the relationship between design and delivery

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to present how the evaluation of one of the modules, vocabulary teaching, of the BA programme in ELT at the School of Languages-Tapachula of the Autonomous University of Chiapas, was carried out. It is said that the design of a programme at the curriculum level and the delivery of it in the classroom might present some difficulties. Burns (1999) mentions that there is a gap between curriculum specifications or ideals and what actually happens in classroom practice.

The research project investigated:

Programme design: how and by whom the module was constructed.

The students' attitudes toward the subject.

The problems encountered by the teachers when following the programme.

The modifications, if any, made to the programme by the teaching staff.

The data collected was: a survey of students' attitudes, staff interviews (e-mails) and document analysis (syllabus). The participants are students reading for the BA in ELT. The results of the questionnaires and interviews were compared in order to draw out some implications

The topics considered were: a brief review of teacher training, current models in language teacher training; developments in vocabulary teaching. In the evaluation section the topics mentioned are the ones related to how the evaluation was carried out: evaluation of a programme, summative and formative evaluation, intrinsic and extrinsic evaluation, participatory evaluation and case studies. The evaluation of the module was planned as a 'case study' and, because of the participation of teachers, students, staff and myself as an insider evaluator, it can be considered a participatory evaluation.

The need to carry out programme evaluation was noted by the curriculum design committee, then if the teachers do not carry them out, outsiders would do it and it might be that the teachers' opinions would not be taken into consideration when trying to implement changes. To avoid this, it is advisable to carry out constant programme evaluation within the institution. Mackay (1994: 142) states, that intrinsically motivated evaluation "addresses specific concerns of teachers and learners to improve aspects of the programme"

Devising a model for evaluation can be useful, not only for one course but can also be found to apply to other modules of the programme.



## 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present a summary of the investigation carried out to evaluate one module – vocabulary teaching - of the BA programme in ELT at the School of Languages in Tuxtla, San Cristobal and Tapachula of the Autonomous University of Chiapas. This module was chosen because there have been some problems in trying to deliver it in the way it was devised. Burns (1999) says that there is a gap between curriculum specifications or ideals and what actually happens in classroom practice.

The topics to be considered will be: a brief review of current models in language teacher training, developments in vocabulary teaching and programme evaluation; description of the fourth semester where the *vocabulary teaching module*, or didactics of lexis, is given; the results obtained from the data collected: the students' attitudes towards the subject, staff interviews and documentation. And as a last point, the modifications made to the programme by the teaching staff.

## 2. Current models in language teacher training, developments in vocabulary teaching and programme evaluation

### 2.1 Current models in language teacher training

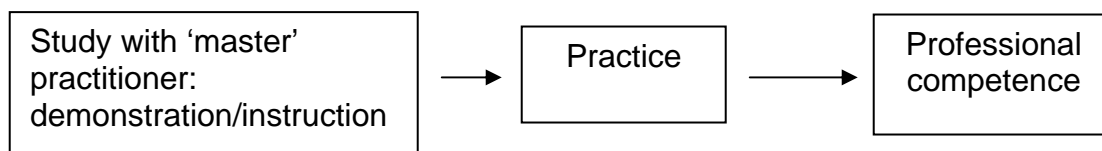
Various models of teacher learning have been suggested, Roberts (1998: 118) summarises those proposed by Zeichner (1983):

Behaviourist	Teacher education (TE) as mastery by imitation of scientifically validated behavioural skills (e.g. micro-teaching).
Personalistic	TE as growth of the whole person and assertion of the self (e.g. counselling-based approaches).
Traditional craft	TE as mastery of inherited craft knowledge by means of apprenticeship to a master teacher (e.g. whole school-based initial teacher education).
Inquiry	TE as development in attitudes and skills-oriented enabling teachers to analyse novel pedagogic problems and arrive at contextually appropriate solutions.

In a similar analysis, Wallace (1991) gives the following three models of professional education:

*a). The craft model*

In this model the trainees learn from the example of a ‘master teacher’: someone who is expert in the practice of the craft. The trainees follow the expert’s instructions and advice. Wallace (op.cit: 6) represents it as follows:



Roberts (1998: 16) observes that the craft model prevailed in teacher education design in the UK until the 1950s and he also adds that the model may be appropriate where “resources are limited or where there is an undersupply of teachers”. Stones and Morris, 1972; Alexander et al, 1984; McIntyre, 1990 (quoted by Roberts, op. cit) criticise its reliance on imitation as a learning process and the behavioural-prescriptive definition of teaching. Our students have been mostly exposed to this model during their previous studies of elementary, secondary and preparatory schools. Then as the idea underlying this model is basically imitative, it will be difficult for the learner-teacher to adapt to unexpected outcomes, when faced with the realities of the classroom.

*b) The applied science model*

The applied science model derives its authority from the achievement of empirical science. Ur (1996: 5) points out that in “L2 education the trainee studies theoretical courses in methodology, applied linguistics, teacher training, etc., which are then, through the construction of an appropriate methodology, applied to classroom practice”. Dewey (quoted by Roberts, 1998) observes that knowledge made by the natural science method is most likely to be transmitted by imposition from above and from outside. The job of classroom teachers is merely to interpret and implement the theory, which is handed down to them by researchers, academics or experts.

*c). The reflective model*

The idea underlying Wallace’s (1991) reflective teaching model is based upon what he calls received knowledge (theory), experiential knowledge (practice)



and reflection. This model is a cycle that starts when the trainee teaches or observes lessons or recalls past experiences. Such observation should be a matter of reflection rather than imitation. It can be called 'critical' reflection that might activate a deeper understanding of teaching.

Murphy (2001: 499-500) says that the purposes of reflective teaching are threefold:

- (1) to expand one's understanding of the teaching-learning process;
- (2) to expand one's repertoire of strategic options as a language teacher;
- (3) to enhance the quality of learning opportunities one is able to provide in language classrooms.

The decision of which model to follow might be crucial for trainers, but the fact that prior knowledge plays an important role in teacher education is something that has to be considered as well. The implication is that, when learners start their undergraduate studies, they bring with them their own pre-existing ideas or beliefs about teaching and learning, which might not be quoted as either 'right' or 'wrong', but may act as a starting point for learning to teach. This suggests that teachers need to understand learner-teachers' perceptions before providing input or trying to lead them to change.

## 2.2 Developments in vocabulary teaching

The different language learning approaches that emerged in the past did not give vocabulary the importance it deserves and did not take into consideration the use of the *General Service List of English Words* (GSL), published by West in 1953. Word frequency was an important criterion for the selection of the 2,000 words included in it. Schmitt (2000: 17) comments that "the list has been immensely influential and that Michael West is probably the best-known scholar to harness the idea of frequency to second language learning."

Later on, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, vocabulary teaching started coming into its own. Towards the second half of the 1980s, syllabus theorists like Dubin and Olshtain (1986, quoted by O'Dell, 1997) began to direct attention to



lexis, observing that possession of a good vocabulary stock could enable many learners to communicate effectively. In 1984, in the Introduction to their *Cambridge English Course*, Swan and Walter (quoted by Thornbury, 2002: 14) wrote that “vocabulary acquisition is the largest and most important task facing the language learner”. It is noticeable that course-books began to include activities that specifically targeted vocabulary.

The proven fact that much of what was previously considered “grammar is actually constrained by lexical choices” is expressed by Schmitt (2000: 14). Then it is possible to say that grammar, as well as vocabulary, is an important area to take into account in the teaching/learning process. Moreover Thornbury (op. cit) comments that any language emerges first as words. Children start using them and make themselves understood just using ‘words’.

### **2.3. Programme evaluation**

Brown (1995:220) points out that the purpose of programme evaluation is “to determine whether the objectives have been achieved and whether the goals have been met”. Goals might be regarded as general statements of the programme’s purposes, and objectives as those specifying ways in which the goals will be achieved. Objectives might need to be altered to some degree during implementation, and the priority of certain objectives might change, some may prove to have been misconceived and so require reformulation.

Beretta (1992: 276) gives a list of purposes of evaluations. Some of those mentioned, which are relevant to this study are the following:

- To decide whether a programme has had the intended effect
- To identify what effect a programme has had.
- To justify future courses of action.
- To identify areas for improvement in an ongoing programme.

#### **2.3.1 Summative and Formative Evaluation**

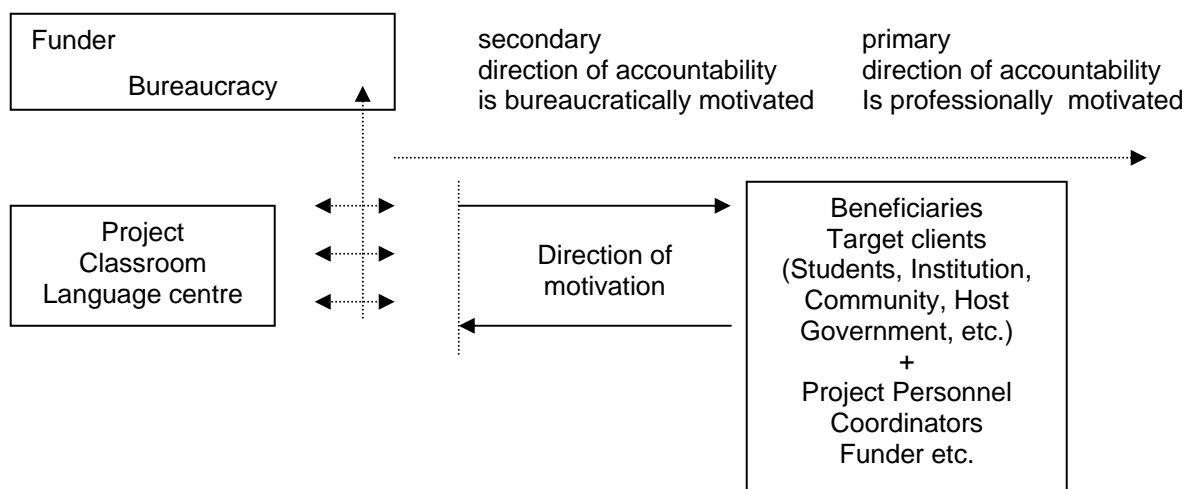
Scriven (1967, quoted by Beretta, 1992) made the distinction between ‘formative’ and ‘summative’, defining formative as a matter of improving ongoing

programmes and summative as determining the effects of a programme that has come to an end. Williams and Burden (1994) claim that there is a tendency to opt for a 'summative' type of evaluation. This involves selecting either teachers or students, and then applying tests at the beginning and end of the programme.

Evaluation for purposes of programme or project development can be considered as 'formative' in nature. It can operate as a form of quality control, the monitoring of progress and the provision of immediately useful information for decision-making and change, at different levels.

### 2.3.2 Extrinsic and Intrinsic Evaluation

There is a distinction between extrinsic (or externally imposed and controlled evaluation) and intrinsic evaluation (decided on and carried out by those involved in the programme). Extrinsically motivated evaluations conform to the traditional model of bureaucratic inspection. There will be an 'external' evaluator and much of the data may be collected by a project manager, head teacher or a director of studies. Conversely, intrinsically motivated evaluations are conceived, motivated, and designed at the 'programme' level, with or without the direct involvement of the bureaucracy. This is illustrated in the following figure:





It is possible to say that if language programme personnel – principals, directors of studies, head teachers, and teachers undertook their own internal reviews, not only would their programmes benefit from the information gained, but the bureaucrats would be less likely to impose their own (Mackay, 1994).

### **2.3.3 Participatory Evaluation**

The term ‘participatory’ was apparently coined by Alderson and Scott (1992: 38), who mention that “even though there had been some discussion of its desirability, few writers had at that time directly addressed the design of participatory evaluation”. They claim that a ‘participatory evaluation’ will involve the sharing of decisional and planning roles, as well as the donkey-work amongst all involved. What Tribble (2000: 320) points out is that by “combining insiders management and involvement with outsider consultation and moderation of evaluation” there is a double benefit: accountability is met and more professionally effective teams implement the project. This would be the case if UNACH wants to have the whole curriculum of the BA evaluated.

### **2.3.4 Case Studies**

It was decided to carry out the evaluation as a ‘case study’ considering that one of its major strengths is its suitability to small-scale studies, as is the case of the evaluation carried out here. The case study approach can be thought as a highly appropriate tool for teachers wishing to promote their own professional development within their own context and “it tends to be tightly focused and personalised” (Wallace 1998: 170). On the other hand, traditional empirical research is mostly concerned with establishing general scientific laws that apply to the whole class of people or phenomena.

Adelman et al (1976, quoted by Nunan, 1992: 78) suggest that there are six principal advantages of adopting the case study:



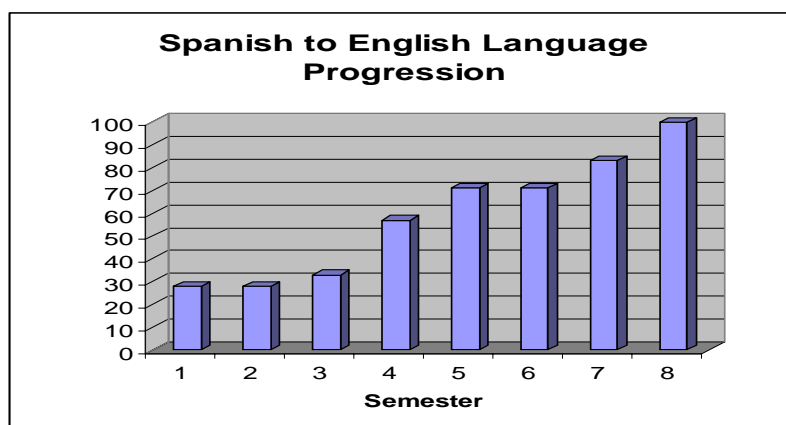
1. In contrast with other research methods, it is strong in reality.
2. One can generalise from a case, either about an instance, or from an instance to a class.
3. It can represent a multiplicity of viewpoints, and can offer support to alternative interpretations.
4. Properly presented case studies can provide a database of materials that may be reinterpreted by future researchers.
5. The insights yielded by case studies can be put to immediate use (for staff/institutional development; for formative evaluation).
6. Case study data are usually more accessible than conventional research reports.

Hopkins (1985), McDonough and McDonough (1997), Wallace (1998) and some other writers agree with the statement that case studies can use a range of techniques: observation, questionnaire and interview, verbal report, and so on. Questionnaires and e-mail interviews were regarded as best suited to the particular situation of the BA vocabulary teaching module evaluated.

### 3. Description of the fourth semester

Five modules are delivered in English in the fourth semester: English IV, Linguistic Description of English, Sociolinguistics II, Didactics of Grammar and **Didactics of Lexis (vocabulary teaching)**. The one delivered in Spanish is Evaluation and Accreditation. It is significant to mention here that vocabulary teaching was only assigned '3' hours a week (45 hours a semester) not enough time to cover the topics included in the original programme.

The proportion of subjects that are delivered in the target language progressively increases along the curricular map, in order to promote the students' ability to become competent in the language they will be using as a means of teaching. This proportion is translated into 28% for the first two semesters, 33% in the third semester, 57% in the fourth, 71% in the fifth and sixth, 83% in the seventh and, finally arriving at 100%. (Moreno, 2000). This can be seen in the following graph:



### 3.1 Didactics of Lexis (Vocabulary Teaching)

#### 3.1. Description of the Vocabulary Teaching Module (Didactics of Lexis)

Vocabulary teaching is offered in the fourth semester of the BA. It is a compulsory subject and it is included in the methodology and teaching practice strand. The general objectives of this module were described as follows:

By the end of the course the student will be able to.

1. Recognise, define and explain the characteristics of lexis, its patterns inside discourse and its usefulness in promoting the learning of English as a foreign language (EFL).
2. Define, explain and apply the principles of learning/teaching vocabulary in a foreign language.
3. Define, explain and apply the different approaches to learning/teaching vocabulary.
4. Evaluate and design a syllabus based on the lexical approach.
5. Analyse, evaluate and design specific materials for vocabulary development.

The units mentioned above include different topics:

- 1) Lexis and its characteristics (3 topics, 5 hours).
- 2) The learning and teaching of vocabulary principles (6 topics, 5 hours)
- 3) Approaches to the teaching of vocabulary (4 topics, 10 hours)



- 4) Designing a syllabus based on lexis (8 topics, 10 hours).
- 5) Vocabulary teaching materials and tasks (9 topics, 15 hours).

The instruments used to assess the students were: two partial exams - 60% and two research projects 40%

#### **4. The data collected: the students' attitudes towards the subject; staff interviews; documentations**

##### **4.1 The data collected**

The data collected was: a survey of students' attitudes; staff interviews (e-mails to the teachers giving the vocabulary teaching subject) and documents analysis (syllabus). The participants are students reading for the BA in ELT. The results of the questionnaires and interviews were compared in order to draw out some implications.

##### **4.2 Students' attitudes towards the subject**

A questionnaire was applied to the students (20) who were taking the vocabulary module in the fourth semester in the School of Languages in Tapachula. Because of time constraints it was not possible to apply it to the students from Tuxtla and San Cristobal.

The questionnaire given to the students was divided into three sections. Section A was about background personal data and why the students had chosen to study this particular field of education; section B about the whole curriculum to have an overall idea of what the students think are *useful* subjects for their future practice, and which they are *interested* in. It was designed according to what McDonough & McDonough (1997: 175) say about giving an instruction (in ranked questions) like:

“please indicate your order of preference with a number between 1 and 7 where 1= most favoured and 7= least favoured”. In section C the students gave their opinions about the programme and also considered whether the way it was delivered was appropriate for the purpose of their future teaching career.



### 4.3 Staff Interviews

E-mail- interview questions were sent to three teachers of the School of Languages from the different campuses of the UNACH. All of them have taught the vocabulary module. Teacher A is in Tuxtla Gutierrez, the capital of the state of Chiapas; teacher B in San Cristobal de las Casas and teacher C at the School of Languages in Tapachula.

### 4.4 Documentation

Burns (1999: 140) believes that examining documents can help researchers to complement other observations by “building a richer profile of the classroom or the institutional context for the research”. She also claims that they can also give insights into how theoretical and practical values connect. The relevant documentation should include: “course statistics, relevant course documents, course work, written comments, institutional documents, course reviews” (Richards, 2001: 297).

For the purpose of this evaluation the following documents were available:

1. Programmes of all the modules included in the fourth semester of the BA
2. Information about the Study Plan for Teaching Languages
3. Curricular Map “*Licenciatura en la Enseñanza de Idiomas*”
4. Course reviews: a written account of the module (vocabulary teaching) was prepared by the teachers who taught it.

Richards (op. cit: 298) says that it course reviews should be “an account of how the course progressed, what problems occurred, the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the course, and suggestions for the future”. The teachers from the different departments gave the most valuable information, when doing so, not only descriptively but also reflectively.

The term triangulation was introduced by Denzin (1970, quoted by Lynch, 1996) and it refers to a collection of information from different sources using different methods in order to avoid the bias inherent in any one particular source or method. For reasons of practicality, researchers generally have to select from



among the triangulation possibilities available to them, but it is important to realise that you are not limited to using three sources, you can use four, five, six, or whatever is appropriate in a particular study. In this study three sources were used: questionnaires, interviews and documents.

There follows a description of what could be triangulated from the responses given by the teachers and students:

- a). *Module importance* – students, as well as teachers, believe that it is important to have a vocabulary module in the curriculum
- b). *Proficiency in language skills* – concerning the students' proficiency in English, more than half of them think that they need more practice in the four skills to be able to participate in class. The teachers said that the students' skills have to be improved, mainly writing, reading and everyday English.
- c). *Timing* - The size of the programme is not appropriate to the time assigned to the module. The students agreed with the teachers that more time should be allotted to it, because of the importance of covering more aspects of learning/teaching vocabulary.

## **5. Modifications made to the programme**

Here the teachers expressed the view that unit 4 proved to be hard to apply the way it was devised. The first teacher (A) said that there were only two books in the library to consult related to the lexical syllabus and that at that time there were not enough computers for the students to work with. She also mentioned that she completely deleted most of unit 4 - 'Designing a syllabus based on lexis' and only had the students read something related to the Lexical Approach. Regarding the other units of the original programme (1, 2, 3, 5) with some small changes, they remained the same. Teacher B, as she had already made changes, says that very few problems were met and that she knows that in the future she can solve them. Teacher C that tried to cover the whole programme said that it was impossible to do so.



In the event of continuing to have 3 hours a week, it could be possible to use the programme, devised by the teacher from San Cristobal (appendix 1) it includes 4 units not 5 as in the original one. The following topics are covered in it:

- Unit 1 Words and their meaning.
- Unit 2 The learning and teaching of vocabulary principles.
- Unit 3 Approaches to the teaching of vocabulary.
- Unit 4 Vocabulary teaching materials and tasks.

What is very important here is to consider that changes should be made after the teachers have adopted a research orientation to their own classroom and based on the results obtained, propose changes. Periodic meetings should be scheduled, not only of the directors but of the teaching staff as well, to discuss the feasible changes to be made. Collaboration between the three Language Schools is crucial.

## 6. Conclusion

In the last part of this paper the implications drawn from the results were set out, and based on these some suggestions for possible changes were made. It might be the case that teachers and students have a sense of ownership with regard to the changes proposed, because they have been based on their responses. It is pertinent to say that, once implemented, programmes are modified continuously in response to ongoing assessments of their effectiveness. This effectiveness will be proved or disproved by carrying out more participatory evaluations after the implementation of the changes has taken place, always bearing in mind that evaluation is an ongoing process that forms the basis of appropriate and effective decision-making.



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### Appendix 1

UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE CHIAPAS  
ESCUELA DE LENGUAS SAN CRISTÓBAL  
LICENCIATURA EN LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS  
DIDÁCTICA DE LOS ELEMENTOS LÉXICOS CUARTO SEMESTRE

#### TEACHING VOCABULARY -- Lic. María Luisa Ávila Losada

##### **Unit 1 Words and their meanings**

- 1.1 Introduction: language awareness.
- 1.2 Collocation
- 1.3 Word meaning, word use and word grammar.
- 1.4 Sense relations (synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms, homophones, homonyms and other types of relations.)

##### **Unit 2 The learning and teaching of vocabulary principles**

- 2.1 The role of dictionaries in language learning.
- 2.2 Organization of the mental lexicon.
- 2.3 Decisions about content and criteria for selection.
- 2.4 Active and passive Vocabulary.
- 2.5 Techniques to present and practice vocabulary items.
- 2.6 Discovery techniques.
- 2.7 Recording new words.

##### **Unit 3 Approaches to the teaching of vocabulary**

- 3.1 The communicative approach.
- 3.2 The lexical approach.

##### **Unit 4 Vocabulary teaching materials and tasks**

- 4.1 Collocation.
- 4.2 Grouping/categories.
- 4.3 Synonymy and Antonymy relations.
- 4.4 Guessing and inferring meaning from context.
- 4.5 Word grammar.
- 4.6 Anagrams and games.

#### **COURSE EVALUATION**

- \*Quizzes and partial exams: 50%**
- \*Two assignments: 40%**
- \* Continuous assessment 10%**

#### **Biodata**

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